fectly, but they did kick the AWOL habit.

In the early 1970s, I commanded the 1st Battalion, 505th Infantry, 82d Airborne Division for two years. It was a hard time for the Army. The Vietnam War had just ended, and enthusiasm was at a low ebb. The Army was practically out of control, including the division. It was the time of "do your own thing," drugs, nighttime terror, and racial problems. The men did not look or act like soldiers, and many of our professional NCOs had been ground out in the Vietnam mill.

The slogan we chose was "Get It Together." We were the 505th Panthers and we had a unit history that wouldn't quit; our most serious problem was a lack of trust and faith in each other. The lack of discipline manifested itself in drug use and racial problems. The slogan "Get It Together" had a definite appeal, because no man—white, black, Hispanic, or any other—wanted to be in a unit where the soldiers had no trust or respect for each other.

We were not perfect, but the slogan had meaning to the key leaders and men of the unit, and it helped us at a time when we desperately needed help.

In the late 1970s, I found myself commanding a mechanized infantry brigade—two mechanized battalions and one tank battalion—in the newly activated 24th Infantry Division at Fort Stewart. My predecessor in the 2d Brigade had built and trained a solid mechanized infantry brigade. Now I wanted to capture the imaginations of its soldiers.

When the division received its high priority mission for rapid deployment as part of the Rapid Deployment Force (RDF), we decided to call our brigade the "Vanguard" Brigade—out in front of the rest. And since the 24th Infantry Division was the "Victory" Division, our slogan was "Vanguard to Victory."

I believe the 3,000 men who were in the "Vanguard" Brigade remember it because we were able to capture their imaginations, harness their energies, and focus their behavior on the unit's mission.

The leaders of each brigade, battalion, and company should always be trying to capture the imaginations of their men. They should not overlook meaningful and sincere slogans that can help focus the unit on its predominant problem or effort at a given time.

The power of people—combined and focused desirable behavior—can make any unit a winner. And in the infantry, what it takes is weapon system proficiency, physical conditioning, and focused leaders and soldiers.

Brigadier General James E. Shelton, who retired in 1983, served in eight divisions and the Berlin Brigade. He is a Combat Infantryman and a Master Parachutist.

The Soviet Army
Coming to Terms with Its Afghan Experience

CAPTAIN PAUL H. VIVIAN

Defeat for an army, whether political or military or both, is traumatic. In the aftermath of the United States' exodus from Vietnam, the U.S. Army went through a period of intense soul searching. Were we militarily defeated or simply abandoned by pusillanimous politicians and a fickle public? Did we fight honorably? Did we fight well? Not surprisingly, the Soviet Army in the aftermath of its own "exodus" from Afghanistan is wrestling with the same basic questions.

A part of this process of reappraisal is the recent decision of *Voenno-istoricheskii zhurnal* (*Military History Journal*) to establish, as a new, regular feature of the magazine, a section entitled "Afghanistan: Summary and Conclusions." Fittingly, they asked Lieutenant General Boris Vsevolodich Gromov, the last commander of the Limited Contingent in Afghanistan and the current commander of the Kievan Military District, to inaugurate the new feature section.

General Gromov contributed an article entitled simply "They Defended, They Learned, They Built." The essay does not contain any profound military insights; it is, rather, an emotional retrospective. The article has a lively style, reminiscent of a letter dictated to a secretary rather than a manuscript that has been labored over. Gromov's goals are to justify the sacrifices of his soldiers and to defend them against those who would besmirch their honor. In the process, Gromov reveals much about himself.

General Gromov's article offers a highly personal, rather than an "objective, historical," perspective on Afghanistan. The portrait that Gromov paints of himself is that of a professional soldier—a combat soldier—who is intensely loyal to his Motherland.

He establishes his credentials by point-

ing out that he has served several "tours in country." His first tour was from 1980 to 1982 when he served as a chief of staff and then commander of an unidentified *soedinenie*—an imprecise term that can mean a regiment or a division. He returned for a second tour from 1985 to 1986 as a representative of the Soviet General Staff. And his last tour, of course, was as commander of the Limited Contingent.

Like all good soldiers, General Gromov cannot resist telling a good war story. With clear pride, he reflects upon Operation Magistral, which he implies that he planned and led. The story is an entertaining one, but the real purpose of recounting it here is to demonstrate the competence and sophistication of the Soviet Army in Afghanistan.

As General Gromov tells the story, the enemy was dug in along the Satekundav Pass. The "*dushmani*," the Soviet term for Afghan freedom fighters, had constructed an elaborate network of obstacles overwatched by well-camouflaged and well-prepared defensive positions. The mission was to root out the enemy from the pass—in short, an unenviable task for any attacker and certain to result in heavy casualties.

Gromov studied the situation intently. His staff suggested the following course of action: First, there would be an airborne drop on the pass. This would force the enemy to reveal themselves and their positions. Then artillery and attack aviation would deliver a devastating blow against the enemy. Following this would be an attack by heavy weapons and infantry. It was certainly an audacious, albeit conventional, plan of attack.

The actual conduct of the operation is best described in Gromov's own words:

The paratroopers were carried to the drop zone in the vicinity of the Satekundav Pass by aircraft of the military transport aviation. A gust of fire fell on them. Anti-aircraft machine guns and cannons fired on them. And at that moment the firing positions of the mutineers were revealed for the blows of Soviet and Afghan attack aviation. Then this was followed by an artillery attack. In the course of an hour the entire system of fire of the mutineers was destroyed.

Victory?—Yes. But at what price? What about the hapless airborne soldiers who were dropped on the objective to force the enemy to reveal themselves? Another example of Soviet disregard for human life? No! As Gromov noted, "We didn't lose one man, because the airborne drop was a deception." Although precisely what happened is somewhat unclear, it appears that the transports did drop parachutes with dummies and not men weighing them down. No doubt it was tactical skill such as this that catapulted Gromov out of obscurity to high command.

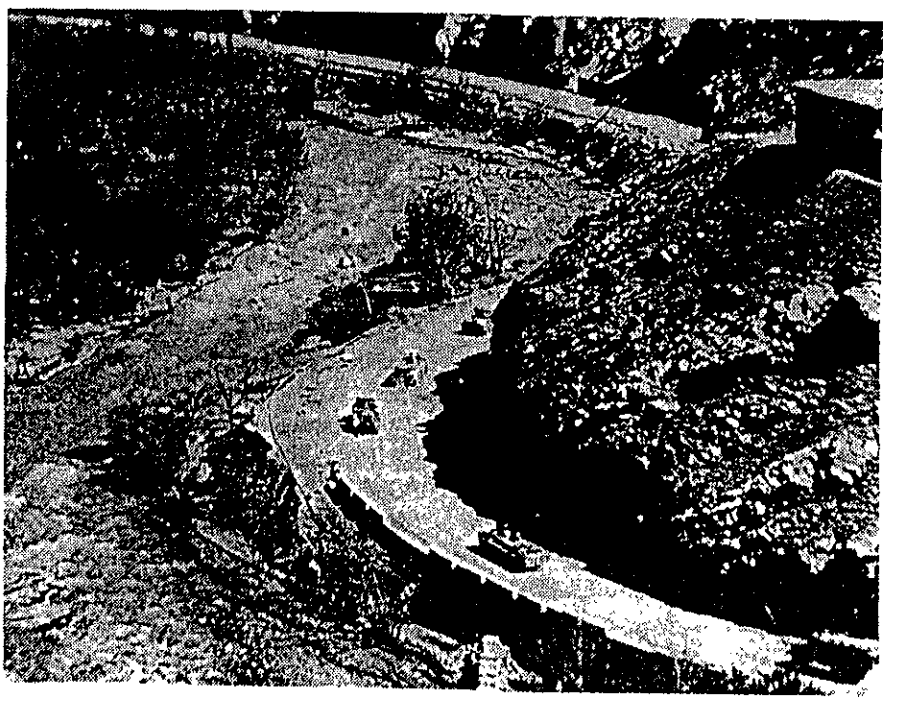
Although the Soviet Army was capable, it encountered numerous problems. "The most important of them," according to General Gromov, was "the problem of the preparation of personnel for battle; the reorientation of peoples' consciousness from peaceful to military order, their psychological preparation." Acknowledging that the transformation from student, worker, or *kolkhoznik*, to warrior is a tough one, the General somewhat disingenuously assures his readers that most made the transition well, living up to the standards set by earlier generations. Unhesitatingly, he credits "our officer corps, political workers, party and *Komsomol* organizations" for helping turn young men into determined soldiers.

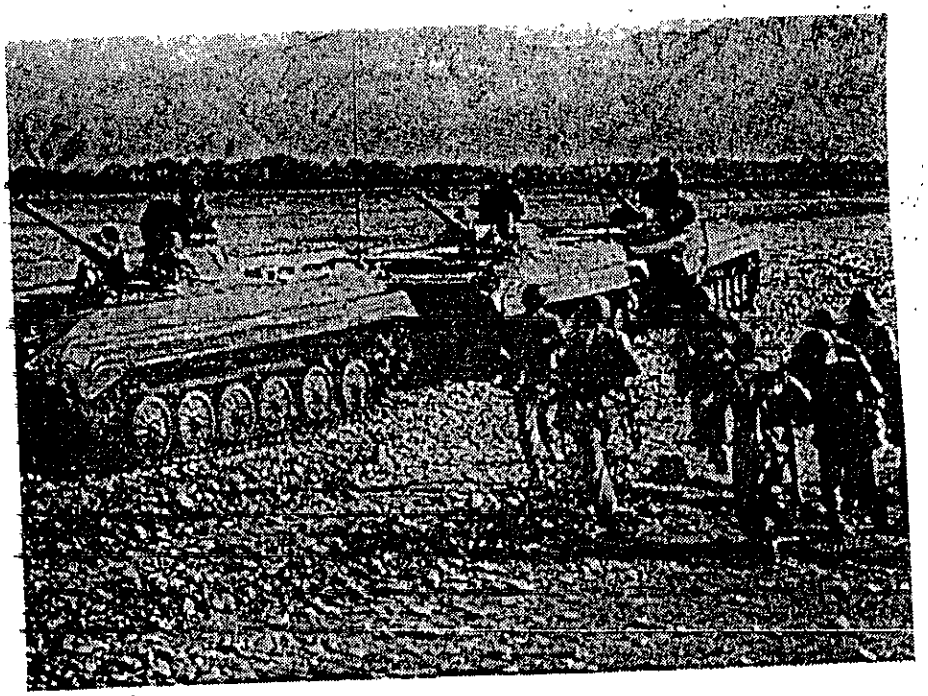
While the transition from school boy to warrior may have been difficult, the Soviet soldier, in Gromov's view, made this change and fought well and bravely. To make this point, he refers to the exploits of Soviet paratroopers on Hill 3234 on 7 January 1988. Although outnumbered, the paratroopers hung on in spite of repeated attacks. Under the onslaught of the attacking freedom fighters, their perimeter contracted. But the paratroopers fought tenaciously, vowing to fight to the last bullet; against the odds, they held on. Gromov is moved to remark, "Remembering this battle, one cannot help but reflect on how strong was the spirit of our boys, how strong was the will and adherence to the military oath and to a military order!"

In spite of such examples of heroism, though, General Gromov despairs of the press's recent tendency to disparage the competence and courage of the Soviet soldier and especially the Soviet officer. He says:

Watch out for those topics which are becoming offensive for our soldiers and especially for the officer corps. Often [the press] expresses the idea of the foolishness and heartlessness of the commander officer, the narrowness of his horizon.

Moreover, General Gromov is very sensitive to the charge that relationships between officers and soldiers were not





harmonious. He points to the numerous letters received in the command and political section that testify to the contrary. Gromov writes:

Friendship, born on Afghan soil in complex, dangerous circumstances among officers, warrant officers, soldiers, and sergeants continue to live even after the return to the Motherland.

Then the emotional nature of this essay is indicated by Gromov's jump back to the issue of soldierly steadfastness and bravery. He points out, for instance, that between 30 and 35 percent of all troops in Afghanistan were dedicated to rear area security operations. The troops were deployed in small, scattered outposts along main supply routes. General Gromov speaks in awed terms of their endurance and courage in such hard circumstances:

But who, where, and when, in what program of military training envisioned operations like this? ...One and a half, two years soldiers carried out service on these commanding heights, at a remarkable distance from one another, and, it is possible to say, surrounded by the enemy. There must be psychological compatibility, endurance, and staying power in a group of from seven to twelve people. Indeed, besides a camouflaged position, which was built by their own efforts from on-hand materials, technology, and weapons, there was nothing else.

With the same emotional intensity, General Gromov enumerates other hardships and privations that these soldiers faced:

Reserves of supplies of food, water, ammunition, firewood, and coal—all was supplied to the soldiers every two weeks and occasionally once a month. What can you say about this, how did people survive these long days, weeks, months, years? But people lived, carried out services, fulfilled military tasks. Undergoing attacks, shelling, they repulsed the enemy. This isn't an exploit, courageous and brave, this is not preparedness to carry out the burden and deprivation of military service?

Following this outburst, General Gromov reflects on the "good" that the Limited Contingent accomplished in Afghanistan, listing the number of hospitals, schools, and roads the soldiers built.

Gromov then bounces back to the emotional issue of prisoners of war. He notes that in Afghanistan as in World War II ("the Great Patriotic War") many soldiers said, "Better dead than a POW." The general recounts the story of Senior Lieutenant Onishchuk, Junior Sergeant Islamov, and Private Muradov who "blew themselves and dushmani up with hand grenades" rather than surrender.

In the latter part of his essay, General Gromov focuses his attention on what he sees as the major "lesson learned" in the realm of operational methods—the devastating effects of mine warfare. The Afghan freedom fighters used mines to good effect. According to Gromov, "Basically, they mined the hard to travel parts of the road, approaches to water sources, detours, fords, villages, base areas, and depots." Moreover, they used mines in large number. For example, in 1988 some 4,882 antitank mines, 3,800 antipersonnal mines, and 1,162 fougasse bombs were uncovered, disarmed, and destroyed. The general goes on to note:

Mine warfare forced us to change our tactical methods and structure of the battle order of convoys. Thus, as a result of much analysis and experimental controls, the present working structure of military police units (otriada obespecheniia dvizheniia) was worked out.

Thus ends the analytical portion of Gromov's essay, and the general returns to the basic theme of his essay—the desire to defend the Soviet soldier who fought in Afghanistan from charges of dishonor or incompetence:

And there is still one thing I want to say. Now, when the Afghanistan theme has closed, there have appeared many honest, objective publications, but along with them one sees some material of an entirely different kind. Some guy "blessed" by a visit of several days on Afghan soil, arrives at general conclusions, and tries to artificially create the problem of "Afghan vets" in the USSR by hatching and absolutizing several separate negative facts in order to blacken the exploits of those Soviet people who with honor fulfilled their internationalist duty.

At about the time this article was printed, General Gromov appeared on the Soviet television program "Vzglad," or "View." The views he reflected on the air were the same as those in his article, but in the unstructured atmosphere of an interview, he allowed a sense of bitterness to seep in:

(Correspondent) For a long time, particularly during the first stage of combat activities in Afghanistan, our television and press gave various routine accounts about our troops planting trees, about

people meeting them with flowers, and only a little information leaked out about the fact that coffins were returning from there. Now what did you feel when you were a soldier in a nonexistent war?

(Gromov) You know, not only I but everybody felt resentment, great resentment as a matter of fact. The resentment was felt in a purely human way, because we were carrying out a difficult job. It was a difficult job in the beginning, I mean during 1980, 1981, 1982, although it was difficult later too, but particularly at the beginning because it was a new job for us and therefore it was twice as difficult.

Later in his interview, General Gromov went on to recount his emotions on crossing the bridge at Termez into the Soviet Union:

On the bridge, I fully realized and felt joy for being the last one out, knowing that no one who made up the limited troop contingent was left behind. On the other hand, there was a sense of bitterness. At the risk of sounding trite, there were tears in my eyes.

Throughout the interview, Gromov's central thesis remained the sense of honor and duty found among Soviet soldiers. For example, when asked, "What qualities underlie the words *Afghan veteran*?" Gromov replied:

I think first of all honesty, nobility, and love for people. Not just towards a friend or comrade, but generally love towards people. This foremost. Of course there is also another important quality which is the ability to do more than you can, more than your strength allows.

There are some dangers in comparing the Soviet experience in Afghanistan with the U.S. experience in Vietnam. First, the two are not morally equivalent. The United States was, in my judgment, morally right in Vietnam; our cause was a just one. The Soviet Union's actions in Afghanistan, however, were unjust. They wanted to install forcibly an authoritarian Marxist-Leninist regime on the Afghan people. Second, it is fair to say that the level of both popular and governmental support for prosecuting the Afghan war was significantly higher in the Soviet Union than such support was in the United States for our involvement in Vietnam.

Nevertheless, there are parallels. Neither nation achieved a victory in the manner the public had come to expect—that is, the complete, unconditional defeat of an adversary. Both nations found themselves involved in long, drawn-out guerrilla wars of attrition. Furthermore, the returning soldiers encountered a populace that was either hostile or indifferent to their sacrifices.

The trauma of Vietnam caused the U.S. Army to enter into a period of introspection that led to heightened concerns over issues of ethics and questions of management versus leadership. For the Soviet Army, this process of introspection has just begun.

General Gromov, as the last commander of the Limited Contingent in Afghanistan, is the natural point man in this process of reevaluation. He must deal with the charges from people such as Nobel Laureate Andrei Sakharov, who, before the Supreme Soviet and on national television, charged that the Afghan war was a "criminal adventure." On the same rostrum, Sakharov also repeated stories that Soviet gunships fired on and killed surrounded Soviet soldiers rather than permit their capture.

For many in the Soviet Army and especially among the Afghan veterans, General Gromov is the one best suited to do battle against that army's detractors, especially those who would disparage the skill and courage of the Soviet soldiers. General Gromov's essay "They Defended, They Learned, They Built" and his other statements should be viewed in this context. The coming months and years will ultimately tell us how well the Soviet Army has come to terms with its Afghan experience.

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Change of Command Inventory

CAPTAIN CHARLES J. McKEEVER

When you are designated to command a company, the first thing you will have to do—along with the outgoing commander—is to conduct a joint 100 percent inventory of all the unit's property and report the results to your battalion commander. This is a task that you cannot afford to take lightly. (See also "Platoon Inventory," by Major Curtis R. Rogers, INFANTRY, January-February 1982, pages 35-36.)

When you sign the company's hand receipt and assume command, you are saying in effect that all of the company's property is on hand and accounted for